

THE KEY
OF THE FIELD

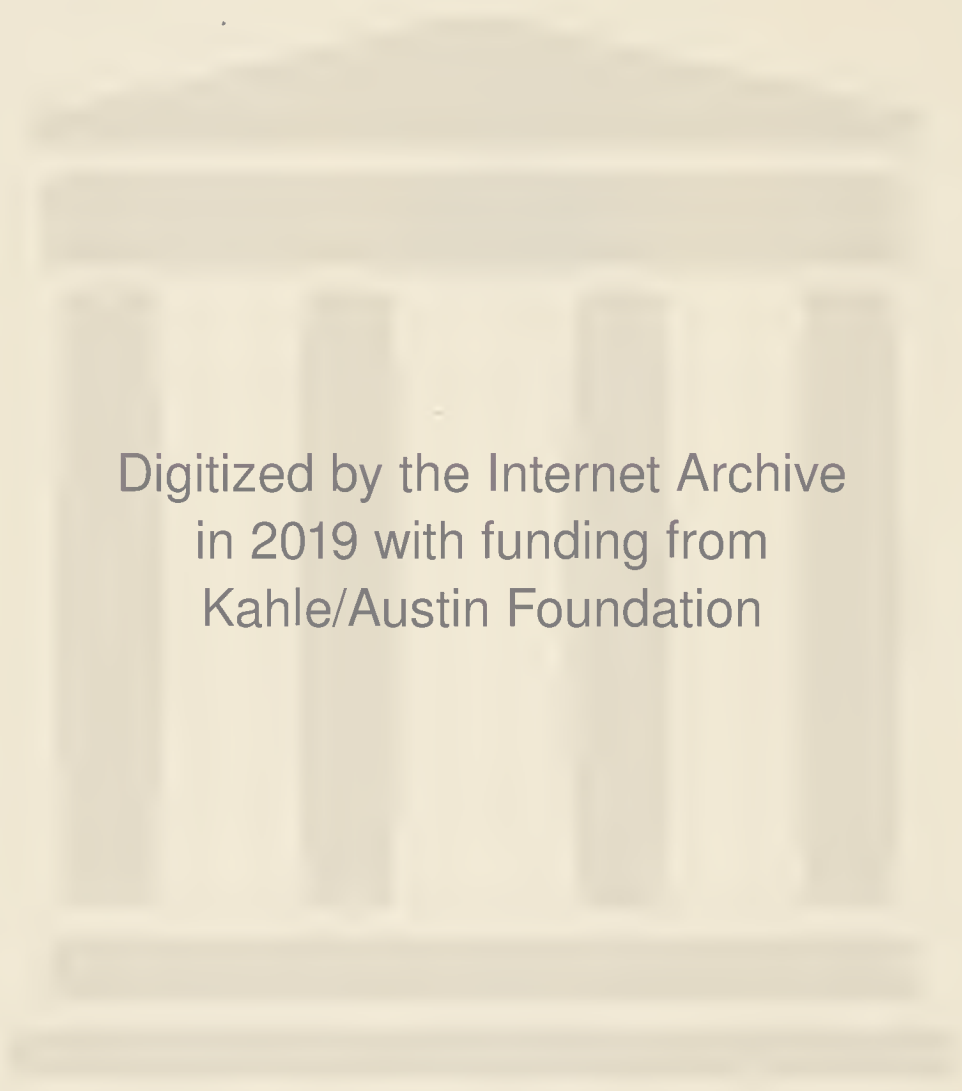
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T.F. POWYS

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T. F. Powys

THE KEY OF THE FIELD

By the same Author

SOLILOQUIES OF A HERMIT.

THE LEFT LEG.

BLACK BRYONY. *With 5 woodcuts by R. A. GARNETT.*

MARK ONLY.

MR. TASKER'S GODS.

MOCKERY GAP.

INNOCENT BIRDS.

MR. WESTON'S GOOD WINE.

THE RIVAL PASTORS.

WHAT LACK I YET?

THE STRONG GIRL AND THE BRIDE.

THE HOUSE WITH THE ECHO.

AN INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS.

FABLES.



THE KEY OF THE FIELD

By T. F. POWYS with a woodcut

by R. A. GARNETT and a Foreword

by SYLVIA TOWNSEND

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A FOREWORD

A HASTY reader might suppose that in the seven years elapsing between his appearance in T. F. Powys' first published novel, *The Left Leg*, and his re-appearance in *The Key of the Field*, Mr. Jar of Madder had lost an uncle in America, invested wisely in the Swedish Match Company, or scratched up a hoard of gold from a tumulus. The "wold Jar" of *The Left Leg* lived in a wooden hut under the hill, visited Madder Rectory by the back door only, and called nothing his own except a necklace of pink beads which he gave away to a little girl. Such acts as these do not, in the common course of things, lead to the possession of Madder Manor House, a lily-pond, fields dressed in such living green that the hearts of men must ache for them, and that final seal and flourish of landed ownership,—an unjust steward.

But this discrepancy will not disturb any one who has taken the trouble to study Mr. Jar's character. All those who know him know that he is a little eccentric. One fine

summer's afternoon in the last century (so I have been told, and I believe it) a Duke of Norfolk received, and not ungraciously, a tip from a gentleman who was driving a dog-cart and felt disinclined to get down and open a gate for himself. All these great ones are the same; and Mr. Jar, who belongs to a very old family indeed, older than Orion or the Pleiades, must be granted a whim of humility every now and then. At such times he may well have lived in a wooden hut for reasons of health or pleasure, dressed like a tinker because he thought tinker's weeds easy wearing, and chosen the back door path for the sake of that old-fashioned plant, Herb of Grace, growing in a great neglected bush near the rubbish heap.

It would be hard if rank and dignity brought no compensations for the cares which they impose. Yet in these bad times, public opinion—as we name our envy—will have none of this doctrine, and would keep God in his Heaven and Mr. Jar in his Justice-Room as strictly as it would keep the typist to her Evening Classes. Only the other day I heard Mr. Weston (just such another as Squire Jar) blamed because, when he visited Folly Down,

he did not rout about more systematically. At this I could only ask the speaker whether he would have the Ancient of Days behave himself in such a manner as to be indistinguishable from Mr. Otto H. Kahn, LL.D.?

The creative artist will always elude his analyst, if only for the reason that he has got there first, and is, by the time the analyst arrives, sitting innocently beside the completed work; but as near as analysis may go, it seems to me certain that Powys is æsthetically justified in his use of God by this very emphasis upon aspects of the Godhead which public opinion cannot sanction. Though Mr. Jar should rise even higher, though he should be made a J.P., his dealings, if they are to carry weight with us, must be somewhat different from our expectations. It is in the nature of Godhead to override our conceptions of it. "We are rational and reasoners," said G. M. Hopkins, "by our false reasoning, as we are moral agents by our sins." Eschewing reason and morality Powys is enabled to give a true picture of life which is not a cross one. He tells us that such as the Trotts will triumph, and that for such as Uncle Tiddy there is no refuge save death; but there is no rancour in

his pessimism. So to accept is to absolve: and Squire Jar, for all his queer ways, his sufferance of the unjust steward, his long absentings, is included in that absolution. Granting at last the one harmless wish possible to man—the wish to die—he is made at one with his poor tenant, and is, by the power of art, in that moment a more godlike figure than any lofty Architect of the Universe or prayer-in-the-slot Providence could be.

Sylvia Townsend Warner.

THE KEY OF THE FIELD

UNCLE TIDDY stood in the road watching the leaves. The leaves spun around him in the wind, for the October frosts had turned them yellow, and the November blasts had shaken them from the trees.

Uncle Tiddy watched the leaves anxiously. He believed they were speaking to him. The yellow leaves were driven here and there; there was no rest for them, for one gust followed another to whirl them about.

Uncle Tiddy remained still and watched the leaves. The wind grew quiet and the driven leaves settled down into the shape of a key. Uncle Tiddy rejoiced. He believed that, one day, he would possess again the key of the field. . . .

The field belonged to Squire Jar of Madder Hall. There was no better field in the whole world than this field.

The field consisted of twelve acres of the richest pasture. The grass grew luxuriously, and in the middle of the field there was a fine

oak-tree that gave a welcome shelter to the cows during the hot summer weather.

The field had once—so Neddy, one of the oldest residents in Madder, used to say—been a portion of the Squire's garden, but the Squire—a worthy man who did not wish to keep all the best of everything for himself—built a low wall, and separated the new field from his old garden, hoping that the field would give to one or other of his tenants a lasting happiness.

But, for all the Squire's generosity—he dearly loves those who live upon his lands—Mr. Jar was a man who did not like to be too closely looked upon. And, so in order to prevent any other than his chosen tenants from walking too near his pleasure-garden where the choicest fruits and flowers grew, and where his friends were entertained all the year round, the Squire enclosed the field with high palings—the same that are used by noblemen for their deer parks—and also had a strong iron gate built, that was locked by a massive key.

The first tenant of the field, to whom the Squire's steward—a learned man, though somewhat old—handed the key, was Uncle Tiddy.

Uncle Tiddy was a proper man for the field, for, besides being a good husbandman, he was never a one to pry into other people's doings. Also his wife was dead, which may have been a reason—other than Uncle Tiddy's honesty—for choosing him as a tenant. For Squire Jar, as all people know, is a little afraid of women.

He had no objection, however, to Uncle Tiddy's niece, Lily, who was hardly more than a child, being between sixteen and seventeen years old—a girl who could dance and run as well as the best, and could skip better, since she was six years old, than any other maid in the village.

If Lily had a fault—and she was so well-grown and comely a girl that anyone might expect her to wish to be a wanton, it was that her heart was responsive to the slightest touch of love, though she seemed kinder to her Uncle than to any other man.

Who then should have been more happy than Uncle Tiddy with kind Lily to tend him, with the Squire's favour, and with the key of the field in his possession?

But even with a field so well worth having, Uncle Tiddy failed to prosper in his business,

and old Grandmother Trott, his near neighbour, told a sad story about him, in which she said that Uncle Tiddy was little better than a sinner—indeed, she believed him to be one.

Grandmother Trott lived with her son John—a widower—and her two grandsons, that were as good as grown men, and ever since the new field was made, the garden hedge removed, palings and a gate set up, this family had envied Uncle Tiddy and desired, with all their hearts, to take the key from him and so to have the field.

Even before Uncle Tiddy had the key, the Trotts had hated the Tiddys, and only because the Tiddys had always been looked upon by others as honest, harmless folk, who kept a few good cows, while the Trotts had been but lean farmers, keeping only a sow or two and a few sickly hens, though now, by thieving management—for they stole the corn from Squire Jar's granary—they grew every day more prosperous, while Uncle Tiddy became every day poorer.

Seeing how affairs were going with Uncle Tiddy, old Grandmother Trott began to be merry, though sometimes she could be glum enough, and she would tell people—even

affirming that she had heard the Squire's steward say the very words—that in the long run the good are sure to prosper, but that every sinner will one day or other lose all that he has.

“There be always ways and means to get the better of a man like Uncle Tiddy,” Grandmother Trott told her son John: “and we have only to mind what we do say, and the field will be ours.”

“’Tis a field,” replied John Trott, “that be too good for Tiddy, for how can his few cows feed off all the rich grass, and they be old too. ’Tis a sin and wickedness that so good a field should be his. I have often seen that when all the grounds elsewhere be burnt by a hot sun as hard as a biscuit, Tiddy’s field be still green and flourishing, so that they few cows ’e do still have be always lying down.”

“Oh, yes,” replied Mrs. Trott angrily, “they do lie down, while ours be walking all day to get a bellyful, or else raging with tail on end to rid them of stinging flies.”

Neither was it only the goodness of the grass that pleased the Trotts and made them wish for the field. They wished also to be spoken of as trusted people, as a family that was highly thought of by the Squire and his steward, so

that at any holiday gathering they might hear folk tell one another: "'Tis they Trotts who have the best field."

Grandmother Trott was an ill-favoured woman. She moved uncomfortably, hunching up her shoulders as if she were always creeping in under low doorways.

One would have thought that, if the Squire's steward heard any tale of hers repeated to him, he would have doubted her words, but alas! now that he was grown old and his eyesight dim, he was known to listen to all the tittle-tattle of the village, which no just steward ought to do, though he would still speak to the people exactly as the Squire had spoken to him.

One Sunday in May, when all things abroad were lovely and shining under a generous sun, Grandmother Trott found her two grandsons at play at tosspenny in the back parlour at the farm, and went in to them with her head sunk as usual between her shoulders.

"Ah ha!" she said, with a smirking sneer, "ain't there no soft and young maids in the lanes for 'ee to tousle and tread, that thee must stay biding here like two worm-eating moles? Lily Tiddy be just tripped into wood

to see what flowers she can spy. Thee be pretty men to toss a penny in a parlour! When I were young, a lusty fellow would throw a girl down time you do look at one, and take good heed that Miss did never rise same as she fell."

George Trott swore loudly. He put his winnings into his pocket and went out.

George was a big handsome fellow, and he hadn't to whisper many words to Lily under the shade of the big trees where she was picking the bluebells, before she willingly permitted him to enjoy her.

As soon as George began to boast at home about what he had done, Grandmother Trott decided what she should do. In a week or two she was noticed walking down the village, as if something pained her. "Maybe 'tis me back," she said, and waited beside the well until Uncle Tiddy went by on his way to the field.

"Look," she said to Mrs. Lugg, who washed the steward's silk hood that he wore on state occasions, and so was in his confidence, "look, there do go Uncle Tiddy! Why, though 'tis summer weather, 'is topcoat be buttoned to 'is chin. That's a-telling folk that

he has sins to hide. He don't look happy neither; 'e be got poor and 'tis 'is evil wickedness that wont let 'e thrive."

Mrs. Trott laughed. She thrust out her head at Mrs. Lugg and laughed again.

"'Twouldn't do," she whispered, putting her mouth near to Mrs. Lugg's ear, "'twouldn't do for Steward to hear what pranks Uncle Tiddy be up to. Uncle Tiddy baint no honest liver. No one don't never hear him curse and swear at thik little cunning wench who do bide wi' 'e. No, no, 'tis all loving words and gifts from Uncle Tiddy to she. 'E don't never strike maiden with milk-ing-stool, as a decent man will sometimes.—'Tis too loving they be for righteous living."

Lily was both kind and loving—as Grandmother Trott seemed to guess—she was also very simple and innocent, and one evening when George met her in the wood, he begged so hard to be shown one peep of the Squire's pretty flowers over the wall, that Lily, wishing well to one who had pleased her, unlocked the gate and let him into the field.

It was now that Grandmother Trott began to talk indeed. Whenever she went to the well—and the act of pulling up the water suited

her stooping shoulders—there would be sure to be someone for her to talk to, and this is how she began—

“Good folk baint honoured these days,” she said. “They others do hide wickedness under a thin covering. Some have what they should never have had if Squire Jar knew all. Uncle Tiddy be a loving one to ’is kith and kin, and when a sort of work be begun at home ’tis continued abroad. Squire were deceived in his good man, but Steward, though ’e be near blind, do pry more closely into what be a-doing.”

Mrs. Trott had not been talking long about Uncle Tiddy before the Squire’s steward heard from Mrs. Lugg what was being said, and told the Squire that Uncle Tiddy permitted the gate of the field to be unlocked and that Lily brought men into the field to look at the Squire’s garden.

This the Squire, himself, was aware of, for once, when reading beside the pond of water-lilies and watching some pretty children at play, he knew that someone had watched him.

When Squire Jar heard the truth, he was very angry, and said that he did not like to have his quiet, nor yet his rompings and gay jollity,

to be watched by rude strangers—for Squire Jar can be merry at times, as well as grave—and thus it came about that the key of the field was taken from Uncle Tiddy and given to John Trott.

That was a joyful day for John Trott when he received the key of the field.

Mr. Jar's trusted steward, who always wore the white robes of his office when anything important was to be done, delivered the key with his own hands to John Trott, in the sight of all people. He also told him—as was proper he should—the Squire's commands, but he hemmed and coughed a little when he said that Uncle Tiddy had disobeyed them in certain matters, for the steward had already forgotten what Uncle Tiddy had done.

As soon as he had finished with his talk, John Trott replied briskly: "I will never"—he swore on oath—"look over the Squire's wall. I swear it. I have no wish to watch the Squire, whether he be merry or sad, nor yet to see how his young friends disport themselves. What others do is no business of mine; my only desire is that my family should prosper, and that I should make a fair and honest profit at my trade."

The reply pleased the steward, who shook John by the hand, and they ate and drank together as the custom is upon such an occasion. . . .

Nature works apace, and when Lily walked out one Sunday, she was carrying a baby, and the people—as people will, all the world over—nodded and gossiped.

“Ah, yes,” said Mrs. Sly, the wife of Nicholas, “many’s the time that I’ve seen Uncle Tiddy taking in the clothes frozen stiff in winter time for thik lazy maid. And the mats too, that be only straw woons, I’ve seen ’e shaking. Who does not know that one kindness do lead to another in people’s homes?”

Uncle Tiddy was too proud a man to deny these evil tales, though he knew that he was being talked about, but, since he had been deprived of the field, he hardly cared what happened to him.

Troubles do not sleep like quiet, well-pastured cows, and poverty—when once it gets hold—rarely lets go again. Soon Uncle Tiddy had nothing left—no cows, nor even any little pigs, nor cock nor hen. He had always spent more money than he should, and so when

the evil days overtook him, he had no savings put away, and Lily was forced to work as a day-servant at the house of the steward.

But, though Uncle Tiddy was now so poor a man as to be obliged to live upon the small wages that Lily brought to him, the Trotts still hated and still wished to torment him.

“There is no trusting to Squire Jar,” Grandmother Trott said crossly, “and though the good steward makes all things seem easy to us, both here and hereafter, yet that cursed Squire—a man who reaps where he has never sown—may suddenly break into our house, like a thief, and take away the key of the field and give it back again to Uncle Tiddy. Only look how Tiddy troubles us and annoys our brave children. He is forever standing before the iron gate that leads into the field. He looks through the bars as though the field were still his own, and waits only for the key in order to go in. I have watched him more than once, and he looks so lovingly into the field, as if he tried to draw the field into his own body, and so to deprive us of it.”

Grandmother Trott spoke the truth, for Uncle Tiddy would be always looking through the gate into the field. Any way that

he took—for he went out of a morning whether the rain fell or the sun shone—would always bring him to the locked gate of the field.

“ You do not know,” he would say to Lily in the evening—for they were alone again, Lily’s baby having died of the smallpox: “ You do not know, Lily, how much I long to possess again the key of the field. Will the iron gate be locked against me for ever?”

And Lily would then try, with all the kindness that was in her heart, to console him for the loss.

“ Do not sorrow overmuch,” she said, one evening, “ for though the steward seems to command all here, he does not always know his master’s mind. And besides, though the key of the field has been given to the Trotts, yet ’tis said that the Squire always keeps a master key at the Manor House, with which he can open, whenever he chooses, any gate upon his land.”

“ But the Squire passed me on the hill to-day, and he turned his face away from me,” groaned Uncle Tiddy, “ and unless I can take the key of the field from the Trotts I shall never get in.”

“Alas!” replied Lily, “I know well enough that the Squire leaves everything now-a-days to his steward, an old man who only thinks of the fine house he lives in, the rich clothes he wears, and the ring upon his finger. Besides that, he drinks too much wine. Since I have been a servant within his doors, I have learned to know his ways, and he is a man very easy to deceive. My fellow-servants are always cheating him in one way or another and they never get found out, for now he grows so blind that he hardly knows the night from the day.”

“Oh, but I long for the field,” said Uncle Tiddy, sadly, “though I do not want it now for any worldly profit that it gives, I only wish to get again the peace and joy of that field, so green and safe it used to be, so freed from loud noises—a place where only the sound of gentle laughter and the happy voices of the Squire’s guests are ever heard.”

“I don’t suppose,” said Lily, in a low tone, “that any of us poor village people could ever get invited into the Squire’s garden.”

Uncle Tiddy shook his head.

“No, we cannot go there,” he replied,

“but we may get into the field if we find the key. It’s a field to delight in, a rich pasture. I remember how I used to lie under the oak, while my quiet cows fed near by. I would lie so still that my very life and being seemed to leave me, for the holy stillness of the field entered into me and I lost myself in it. The air was so very still and I lay so contentedly that I hardly knew myself to be alive.”

“But do not go, I beg you,” said Lily, “always to the gate of the field, for the Trotts are greedy people and are suspicious of what you do. They think that you envy their large red and white cows that feed in the field, and who’s to tell that they might not suddenly swing open the gate and crush you?”

Uncle Tiddy hung his head and said no more.

Grandmother Trott had noticed him going to the gate, and she feared that, if the Squire saw him there, he might be let through, and so she wished to harm him again, hoping that he might die of sorrow.

“Surely,” she said to her grandsons, “thee baint the ones to let a silly maid stay happy when once she be fallen? Where a hedge be broke ’tis easy climbing, and a second mow-

ing be the greatest pleasure. To her again, my fine boys ! ”

This time it was James who was sent to do the mischief, and very willingly he went to it. He lay among some tall bushes in wait for Lily, who had to pass along a dark lane on her way home. Seeing her come hurrying by, he laid hold of her and, by means of a blow or two with his fist, he forced her to yield herself to his pleasure.

Lily wept much, but she did not tell her uncle what had happened, and in a few months' time a merry word went about the village that Uncle Tiddy had been at work again, and people said that another child was to be born in his house—which happened as was foretold, only Lily died in childbed and the babe died, too.

Uncle Tiddy was brought before the Squire's steward upon an incestuous charge, for James Trott swore to having seen the act committed beside the field gate before the sun was risen. “ Many a time,” he said, “ he had seen it done.” But the steward who was the chief magistrate in those parts, being a little put out at the necessity of going to the court, had forgotten to drink his bottle that morning,

and so could see and hear a little more clearly than usual. This being so, Master Steward had a word or two to say to James Trott, and Uncle Tiddy was allowed to go home.

Lily was buried with her child in a grave near to where her first baby was laid, and Uncle Tiddy lived alone, and his wants were relieved by the parish, by order of the Squire's steward.

But even now, though anyone would have thought that they had got the better of him and that he was put down, never to arise, the Trotts would not let Uncle Tiddy alone.—A new-born calf of their's happened to die in the field—owing to neglect, for the Trotts took no thought of their beasts when they needed help—and so when this calf died they wished to blame someone for their fault. They blamed Uncle Tiddy, for Grandmother Trott had seen him look through the gate and bewitch the cows. “He wrote words in the dust,” she said, “and then cast the dirt through the gate at the cows. Who can tell what will happen in the future?” cried Grandmother Trott, “for, as long as Uncle Tiddy do live 'e may one day reach hold of the key. We be all fools to trust to Squire Jar, for Squire

baint never out—except now and again he walks upon Madder Hill. He never looks after his affairs, he is always enjoying himself in his own garden, and there baint no trusting a man who do sit brooding at home. Uncle Tiddy be the one to watch what we be about, and one day, when my son do take a glass wi' Steward, 'e may let fall the key. Folks do tell how Steward do tiddle it finely now, and that 'e don't know right from wrong when 'e be drunk. And, maybe, if Uncle Tiddy did steal the key, Steward might think it were his own to hold. We mustn't let Uncle Tiddy have no rest till 'e be dead."

Grandmother Trott found Mrs. Lugg and Mrs. Sly beside the well, where they were come to draw water. Mrs. Sly had a swollen foot that she was showing to Mrs. Lugg.

"I have something to say to 'ee," said Grandmother Trott, after admiring Mrs. Sly's foot, and speaking in a whisper: "Uncle Tiddy, now 'e baint got nothing to do have begun to talk against Squire Jar. He do say that 'taint 'e alone who have been merry wi' a young maid. 'E do say Squire 'imself have a-done it. Uncle Tiddy do curse and swear how 'tis true what 'e do say. Why, bless us

all, 'e did stand beside Farmer Told's barn—where the echo do shout and talk—and damn 'imself to hell if his words weren't true, naming even the village where the maid did live. He said—and swore to it—that Squire did come at his girl in the night time and overshadowed her with his black cloak that be like a raven's wings. . . .”

The people now began to believe all that Grandmother Trott had to say against Uncle Tiddy, though at first they had not believed her. Uncle Tiddy had been kind to many of them, but even those whom he had once befriended now turned against him, because they knew that he had nothing left to give. The people even forgot how they had once loved Lily, who used to be so merry and playful, and would please even old people by her goodness, for she would talk with old Nicholas Sly, who had a wen as big as a walnut upon his forehead, and was so ugly and foul a man that all the children ran away from him.

Uncle Tiddy was now unable to go out in the day-time, for he could not bear to be treated rudely. Sometimes the village brats would throw dirt after him and spit upon him,

so that he was forced to remain indoors until darkness came.

But when the sun went down behind Madder Hill, and the kind darkness of night brought solace to unhappy man, then Uncle Tiddy would go abroad and search diligently for the key of the field.

Perhaps he might have given up all hope of finding it, and used an old cart-rope to end his torment, had it not been that, in loitering by the field gate upon a very still night when all the village was asleep, he thought he heard a voice that he knew well singing some pretty lullaby over the field and in the Squire's garden. The voice he was sure was Lily's and Uncle Tiddy fancied, as he listened, that infant voices joined in her songs. The sound of their strange singing—though Uncle Tiddy only heard it that once—made him the more eager to get into the field, for he believed that, if he lay down to sleep there, the sound of those voices might come to him again.

And so Uncle Tiddy used to cover himself with a large cloak, and when each evening came, he would set out to search for the key.

The autumn leaves, when they whirled about him and then lay still and silent, told

him that the key existed for which he looked. High up in the heavens, upon clear nights, he saw the key—a key of shining stars. Once, when he stood upon the low cliffs and looked into the sea—the waters being all still—he thought he saw, lying very deep in the sea, the key of the field.

At first when Uncle Tiddy began his search, he used to look in the village and usually he would go to the gate itself, hoping that one of the Trotts might have dropped the key when they locked the gate.

After searching for a few nights Uncle Tiddy's troubles and sorrows seemed lighter for him to bear. He even supposed himself to be happier than he had been in the old days, only excepting, of course, those pleasant hours when he used to lay him down to rest in the shelter of the locked field. For, even when Lily had been alive to love him, his troubles and anxieties had often been hard. He had always feared for Lily, knowing how loving she was, and that, for this very reason, she was more likely to become a prey to the spoiler.

In other ways, too, besides the fears he had for Lily, he used to be troubled. He could never understand how the Squire—whom he

always believed to be a good man—could allow a steward, who had seldom his ears open to anything but lies, to rule his fine estate. Uncle Tiddy always thought it a very strange thing that this Squire who owned so many acres of land, should not have found a way—other than the crude methods of his sottish steward who, more often than not, would use the whipping post as a cure—to protect the simple, the loving, and the kind from horrid outrage.

But now that Uncle Tiddy sought the key so assiduously, his feelings were different. He looked only to the field for comfort.

“Oh,” he would cry out, starting up hurriedly when the darkness drew near, “oh, that I might find the key! Then would I unlock the gate and, full of joy, enter the field. I would lie down there, but not as I used to lie, for I would never wish as I used to do to return again to the village, for I have no hope now left, outside the field. . . .”

After a month or two Uncle Tiddy was not content to look only in the village for the key. He thought that he might find it further away.

Ever since John Trott had possessed the key, that cunning man had prospered finely. The

Trotts had even done so well that they had bought land. They owned a large down of near a hundred acres of goodish pasture, that lay behind Madder Hill. And so, Uncle Tiddy thought it not unlikely that while John was looking to his affairs upon the hill, the key might fall out of his pocket and be lost, for Grandmother Trott was too lazy a gossip ever to mend a broken coat.

Besides that chance, there was also the likelihood that one of the sons of John Trott might have the key of the field in his keeping when he walked out upon a Sunday with his young girl, and, indeed, there was hardly a Madder girl that the two young men did not try to lead into evil ways. So Uncle Tiddy thought it not unlikely that, in the excitement of their naughtiness, one or other of them might let fall the key.

As Uncle Tiddy walked about by night, searching carefully upon the hill, often kneeling upon his knees to be nearer to the ground, a curious fancy would sometimes come to him that Lily, whom he had ever loved as a good man loves a child, moved beside him and helped him to look for the key. . . .

As time went on the Trotts—as was proper

they should—grew richer and richer, for what the young men spent upon drink or women—they even went into the steward's own house in search of their dainties—they easily made up, or else their father did for them, by cheating someone poorer than themselves in a cunning deal.

Uncle Tiddy was glad that they prospered, for, caring nothing now for any possession in the whole world other than the key of the field, he thought that the Trotts—in order to be rid of his importunity—might yield him that, because having so much land they scarcely seemed to give a thought to the field.

They even began to despise and to hate it, saying that it was too small and too mean, a place of too narrow a compass to yield a man any profit. And besides, being too near the Squire's garden, they could not drink or sing or lecher there as in other grounds.

One evening, about twilight, when the barn owls flutter along the hedgerows, Uncle Tiddy went out, and meeting John Trott, he asked him boldly for the key of the field.

John Trott only laughed loudly and went home laughing, leaving Uncle Tiddy to continue his search for the key. So great now was Uncle Tiddy's hurry and excitement to find

what he sought, that he hardly allowed himself time to eat or to sleep. In the day-time he would lie upon his bed and plan in his mind which field to go to when the evening came. If ever he did happen to drop off into a little sleep, a dream would come to him, in which he held the key in his hand, and he would walk along always with a gay step to unlock the gate, though more than once in the dream the key turned in the lock damnable hard.

He had sunk one evening, a little before the time of his going out, into a restless slumber, when all at once he leapt up—the time being near to midnight—out of a strange dream, and putting his cloak over him, he went out into the night.

Uncle Tiddy did not take the path to the downs as he had so often done of late, but turned along the village street and passed the Inn without looking at the ground. This was curious, for he used always to look there when he went by, expecting that John Trott might easily have dropped the key when he walked a little tipsily out of the Inn gate.

But Uncle Tiddy did not hesitate now nor yet look at all ; he walked boldly, as if he knew what to do.

Presently he came to the churchyard gate. He opened it and went in.

The time of year was winter. Mournful clouds hung low, while behind them, hidden as by a thick cloak, was the moon. Uncle Tiddy knew the way. He found Lily's grave and knelt beside it.

And now Uncle Tiddy bethought him of one of the rights that belong to those who are born upon Squire Jar's land. For everyone so born is entitled to call boldly upon the Squire for one gift, in the name of a loving one, but that gift must be the last. Uncle Tiddy would not have ventured upon using this right—for he knew the Squire's rules—had he not first asked the steward for the key. But the steward, as Grandmother Trott had foretold, had come to believe the evil stories that were told about Uncle Tiddy, and so, when he asked for the key, wishing only to walk in the field for a little, the steward looked grimly at him and, with an ugly oath, told him he would be locked out for ever.

“ 'Tis the Squire's own words,” said the steward, “ for without are dogs and sorcerers and whoremongers and murderers—”

Uncle Tiddy was about to call upon the

Squire for the key when his faith failed him. "Suppose," he thought, "that the Squire is a hard man, suppose that were I to call there would be none to answer."

Uncle Tiddy wept bitterly. He wished a thousand times that he had never been born. Despair held him fast and would have killed him, only that Uncle Tiddy, scarce knowing what he did in his agony, cried out to the Squire for the key, and then lay down as though he were dead.

For a long while he lay there until he knew that Squire Jar had entered the churchyard and was standing beside him.

"I never refuse to anyone a harmless wish," said the Squire. "I was walking to-night under the trees in my garden when I heard you call to me for the key of the field."

Uncle Tiddy endeavoured to rise to greet the Squire, but despair had so trod him down that he could not move.

Then the Squire held out his hand to him and raised him up.

"You have asked me for the key," said the Squire, kindly: "do you wish to remain in the field when you have unlocked the gate?"

"Yes, for ever," replied Uncle Tiddy,

“and I require only the smallest space where a man can lie. I wish to forget.”

“Do you wish to forget Lily?” asked the Squire in a very low tone.

“Where she is, I will be,” said Uncle Tiddy, “for we have loved much.”

“Then it’s true that you have sinned,” said the Squire.

“If to love is to sin, then we have sinned,” replied Uncle Tiddy.

The Squire was silent.

“Give me the key,” cried Uncle Tiddy, “do not refuse me the key.”

“I give you mine own,” said the Squire, and he handed to Uncle Tiddy a key of gold. “I will go with you,” said the Squire, “for John Trott may oppose your entrance into the field.”

The Squire and Uncle Tiddy left the churchyard. On the way to the field Mr. Jar talked of the crops and how well he remembered the good hay that Uncle Tiddy had made in former days and how he had sold it to the steward for his master’s stables.

They reached the gate of the field and found no one there to prevent their entering, and Uncle Tiddy—having the master key in his hand—easily unlocked the gate and let him-

self into the field, where, thinking that the Squire had left him, he lay down to sleep. He lay very still and thought that he slept soundly—so soundly that he might have slept for a thousand years. But whether or no he had really slept, he was not sure. He looked up and saw that the Squire was still beside him and the winter's night was the same.

“Come,” said Squire Jar, gently raising Uncle Tiddy from the grass: “come, we will walk through the field—but do you not hear anything?”

“I hear someone singing,” replied Uncle Tiddy. “The voice is Lily’s; she is singing to her babies in your garden.”

Then Uncle Tiddy grew sad. But he still walked with the Squire, until he came to where he remembered the wall had been.

“Look,” said the Squire, “for my garden is beautiful, even in winter. The flowers shine like precious stones; the walks are green, and the air is mild and sweet. You have been my tenant for a season: you will now be my guest for ever.”

“We are in your garden,” cried Uncle Tiddy, gladly. “But where is the Wall?”

“You unlocked the gate of the field with my key,” replied the Squire.



LONDON : CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND GRIGGS (PRINTERS), LTD.
CHISWICK PRESS, TOOKS COURT, CHANCERY LANE

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